



WPHF 2023 GLOBAL CSO SURVEY FINDINGS ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AND HUMANITARIAN ACTION

Uncovering key priorities of women civil society leaders in conflict and crisis

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Women's Peace & Humanitarian Fund

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Background

Working across the peace-development-human rights nexus, local women's organizations are often best placed to foster transformative and sustainable change to achieve peace and gender equality in conflict and crisis-affected contexts. They expand the reach and impact of humanitarian aid, accelerate economic recovery, prevent and mediate conflict, respond to the immediate needs of the most marginalized people and advance gender equality, which results in more sustainable and inclusive peace. They play critical roles as first responders and peacebuilders in fragile settings. Despite this, their work is consistently underfunded and often goes unrecognized.

More than two decades after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, which established women's right to full participation in peace and security decision-making, women's participation remains minimal, and financial resources for local women's rights organizations remains low.

In 2023, the United Nations Secretary General called on the international community and recommended to (i) raise USD \$300 million in new financing for women's organizations in crisis settings over the next three years, including through support to the United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF); and to (ii) allocate a minimum of 15% of ODA to gender equality, including a minimum of 1% to women's organizations, especially grassroots groups mobilizing for peace¹. Despite the latest funding commitments and recommendations, the share of bilateral aid supporting feminist, women-led and women's rights organizations and movements in fragile or conflict-affected countries still remains at only 0.3 per cent,² and total commitments remained at \$148 million in 2021, a decrease from the 2020 commitment of \$176 million.³

The lack of funding and support for local women's organizations is increasingly worrying in the context of escalating conflicts and crises such as Sudan, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Myanmar and Haiti, in addition to forgotten crises in many countries where funding remains scarce in the face of rising needs for women and girls.

There have also been repeated calls to make long-term, flexible and core funding available to local women's rights and women-led organizations as part of a strategy to build peace, stability and social cohesion.⁴ The United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), an instrument for the localization of the WPS agenda and Grand Bargain commitments, is responding to these calls by enhancing women's rights organizations' participation and leadership in the design of locally and women-led responses to conflict and crisis. In 2023 alone, WPHF raised over \$45.8 million, the highest annual amount since the Fund was launched in 2016. Since its establishment, the Fund has supported over 1,200 local women's civil society organizations in 46 crisis and conflict-affected countries, including support to 98 organizations with critical institutional funding to safeguard their existence, strengthen their capacities and adapt to evolving challenges.

WPHF 2023 Global CSO Survey on WPS-HA

In 2023, WPHF launched its fourth global survey with local women's rights and women led organizations that have received programmatic or institutional funding from WPHF since its establishment in 2016. The objective of this survey was to take stock of the space and the extent and quality of support for local women's organizations working on women, peace, security and humanitarian action (WPS-HA) issues in countries where WPHF is channeling funding, uncover



priorities of women civil society leaders, and to effectively advocate with the international community for more flexible and quality funding for local women's rights organizations on the frontlines.

Made available in English, French, Arabic and Spanish, **337 representatives from local women's organizations from 35 countries** participated in the survey, including from Africa (127), Arab States (60), Asia and the Pacific (55), Latin America and Caribbean (49), and Europe and Central Asia (46). Overall, 85% of organizations that participated identify as women's rights and/or led by women, 10% youth rights and/or led by youth and 6% as another type of civil society organizations such as disability focused, humanitarian and/or indigenous rights focused organizations. 21% of responding organizations this year were also headed by someone who is forcibly displaced (refugee, IDP, returnee, or asylum seeker). Over half (56%) of respondents are also from organizations who have received funding through the UN system for the first time.

The anonymous survey specifically explores questions related to risks related to lack of funding for women's rights and led CSOs, the challenges they face in securing flexible funding, as well as the challenging contexts in which local women's rights and led organizations working on WPS-HA often operate. This includes the impact of the security or political situation at the country level, the experience of retaliation or threats to their organizations, and the level of consultation or engagement of these organizations in advancing policy related to WPS-HA. CSO respondents were also asked about their key priorities in funding modalities for women's rights organization in the WPS-HA space.

Results of the survey should be read considering the following limitations: i) only quantitative methodology was used, limiting the descriptions of in-depth experiences from women's organizations; ii) the contexts in which the survey is conducted is ever-changing considering that new conflicts and tensions have arisen since its launch; and iii) new women's organizations in Niger, Guinea, and Venezuela participated in the survey for the first time and thus comparisons from the previous year are not directly comparable. Despite these limitations, this year's findings demonstrates the continued need and urgency to support women's rights organizations in conflict and crisis settings and the importance of ensuring that the experiences and priorities of local women's organizations are prioritized.

Key Findings

Risks to the work and existence of local women's organizations

In 2023, over 66% of local women's organizations across WPHF targeted regions felt that their organization was at either a high or very high risk for continuity due to the lack of programmatic or institutional funding for local women's organizations working on WPS-HA, showing a fairly consistent trend since 2021. This is more alarming when including those who also felt a moderate levels of risk, with 95% of women's organizations identifying themselves at risk due the lack of sustained funding.

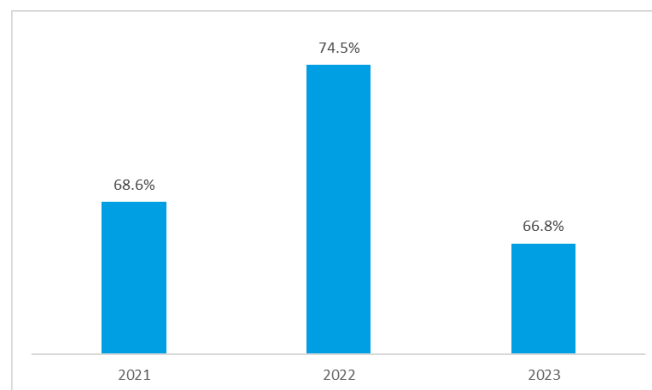


Figure 1: Percentage of CSOs that report high or very high levels of risk to their organizations as a result of lack of programmatic or institutional funding

More than half of the organizations surveyed also note that risks threatening the continuity of their operations or ability to implement programming have persisted and remained constant over the past 12 months, as a result of increased violence and conflict and volatile contexts, lack of long-term funding, and funding that does not prioritize vulnerable groups such as those who are forcibly displaced, living with disabilities or from LGBTIQ+ communities, representing a 6 percentage point increase in the number of organizations who responded to the same question a year earlier in 2022.

Threats and retaliation faced by local women's organizations in WPS-HA

Local women's organizations operate in complex crises and fragile contexts, where the activities of their organizations, security of their staff and rights of their communities are often at dire risk. They continue to serve their communities despite these risks, including targeted threats or retaliation as a result of their advocacy and work in WPS-HA.

In 2022, the UN Security Council called for specific measures to protect women's rights activists and their organizations and held its first-ever formal meeting focusing on reprisals against women participating in peace and security processes. These measures include long-term support for civil society actors so that they can strengthen their own safety measures, or emergency help for protection or relocation when most at risk.⁵

The security and/or political situation, in countries where WPHF is active, continued to impact local women's organizations, particularly in Afghanistan, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Palestine and Haiti. Overall, over half (52%) of organizations reported that the context in which they work negatively impacted their ability to effectively carry out their mandate in WPS-HA. This was most pronounced among organizations in the Arab States region and LAC with 67% and 60% respectively, followed by those in Asia and Pacific with 53% and Europe and Central Asia with 52%.

Moreover, just under half of all organizations (43%) reported that their organization and staff have directly received threats as a result of their work in WPS-HA in the last 12 months. This trend is generally consistent over the past three years (46% in 2021 and 47% in 2022), demonstrating the continued risk that local women's organizations face in engaging in WPS-HA work in their contexts.

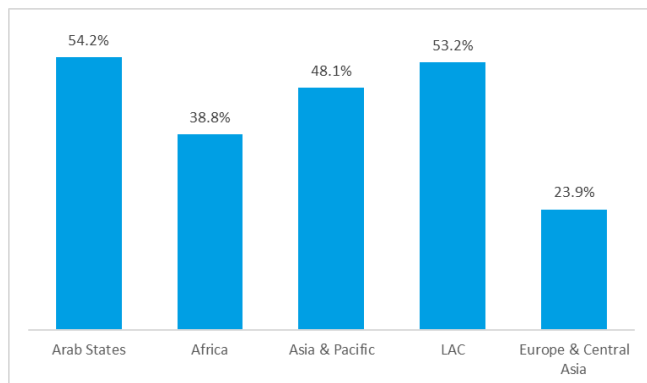


Figure 2: Percentage of CSOs that report that their organization and staff have received threats as a result of their work in WPS-HA

In 2023, CSOs from Myanmar and Papua New Guinea reported the highest rates of threats as a result of their work, with over 80% of CSOs reporting direct threats. This was followed by South Sudan, Cameroon, Palestine, Haiti, Iraq, Syria and Yemen where over 60% of organizations in these countries reported facing threats. It is also evident in the growing number of requests by women human rights defenders (WHRDs) for relocation and psychosocial support through WPHF's Window for WHRDs, which was launched in

2022. In 2023 alone, the Window for WHRDs received over 1,400 requests for urgent protection support due to their activism and to ensure the safety of their dependents.

As continued escalation of crisis and war continue in these regions, women's organizations need more flexible funding and political support in order to safely operate. In response, WPHF has launched several emergency track calls during the year for proposals to ensure rapid and flexible funding of these organizations, including funding for safety, well-being and psychosocial support initiatives for staff and women working on the frontlines of crisis and conflict settings. Moreover, the funding Window for WHRDs is another mechanism to ensure individual WHRDs receive the critical support they need to ensure their protection and well-being with 456 WHRDs and their 1,221 dependents supported since 2022.

Securing Resources for WPS and Humanitarian Action

Findings also reveal that over 40% of CSOs have received less funding than two years ago to carry out their mandates. This trend is consistent with 2022 whereby 44% of CSOs noted the same. The lack of access to multi-year programmatic or institutional funding⁶ also remains a key concern for local women's organizations in fragile and crisis contexts, with over 60% of local women's organizations noting this as a core challenge. 23% of organizations also highlight that more broadly, there is insufficient funding available specifically for WPS-HA work and well over half (67%) of organizations stress that the lack of multi-year programmatic or institutional funding compromises their ability to carry out their mandates effectively.

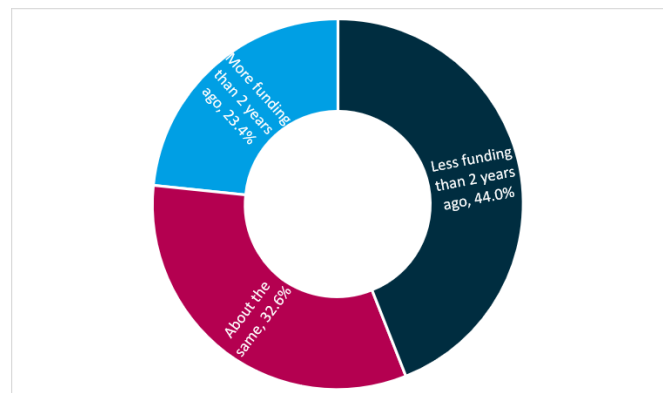


Figure 3: Percentage of CSOs and the level of funding received over the past two years

Barriers to accessing funding and the lack of flexibility in the donor environment for grassroots organizations working in

crisis and fragile contexts continues to be a concern with an equal proportion of CSOs noting that funding is not prioritized for local and grassroots organizations in crisis and conflict settings. The lack of access to information about appropriate funding opportunities is also reported as a challenge in securing resources. Complex application processes and procedures continue to act as a deterrent for engaged and qualified local women's organizations from securing needed funding and 13% of organizations also note that funding is not flexible enough for the contexts in which they work.

This is consistent with recent global research carried out, whereby the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) highlights that, "women's rights organizations struggle to meet many of the application criteria and requirements necessary to secure country-based pooled fund resources. These include fund sizes that are too large for many [women's rights and led organizations], the inability for funding applications to be made in local languages, and requirements for [organizations] to have written policies in place specific to partnering with the UN"⁷. AWID, the global feminist movement, equally calls for making eligibility criteria and funding mechanisms fit for purpose to fund organizations that have the greatest impact on women's rights⁸. The WPHF reviews on an annual basis its procedures for increased accessibility. Almost half of the women's organizations supported are receiving UN funding for the first time, a number that demonstrates WPHF's ability to effectively reach grassroots civil society organizations that serve the most marginalized communities.

An overwhelming 83% of CSOs surveyed called for the need to balance between programmatic and institutional funding in order to effectively deliver in this space. In 2020, WPHF established institutional or core funding as a new stream for local women's organizations to sustain themselves and strengthen their institutional capacities – funding which is often not available to smaller entities. To date, over 98 women's organizations have received institutional support through WPHF. Despite this, this year's survey results continued to reveal that just over half of CSOs still feel that their institutions are at risk due to the lack of available institutional/core funding, and another 27% feel this risk has continued to threaten their sustainability in the past 12 months.

Barriers and Challenges for effective implementation of WPS and Humanitarian Action

Once funding is secured or women's rights organizations have successfully been selected for funding, several barriers

and challenges continue to impede their effective engagement and implementation. More than half of all organizations (52%) report that once selected, the final approval processes are lengthy and cumbersome. This includes 24% who state there are excessive demands from donors on the need for documentation and narrative and financial reporting, deterring them away from the most important work. Another 18% of organizations note that more broadly in the donor landscape, funding is not prioritized for grassroots and local civil society organizations – a unique feature of the WPHF, which has to date supported over 89% organizations at the local level. Other challenges that CSOs highlight are the demands for government compliances and a lack of acceptance from local authorities. This resonates with the broader discussions amongst the international donor community around issues of trust for civil society organizations and the heavy and time-consuming due diligence processes they often face.

Some organizations (9%) also flag that support for their efforts during the implementation phase is limited and that more support in this area would be welcomed, including capacity strengthening opportunities. This accompanying support is also important to occur prior to project implementation - during the project design phase. WPHF has aimed to address this through its Global Learning Hub (L-HUB) and country level capacity strengthening which provides capacity and exchange opportunities for all its CSO partners. WPHF also provides technical support during the application processes, including information sessions and guidance documents. In addition, since mid-2022, under its Rapid Response Window for Women's Participation in Peace Processes and the Implementation of Peace Agreements (RRW), prospective applicants are contacted directly if concept notes are approved to work with WPHF and its INGO partners to discuss their project designs and receive technical support before they launch their projects.

The critical role of women's rights organizations in WPS-HA

Despite the challenges persistently faced by local women's rights organizations working in conflict and crisis settings, some positive transformations are occurring. In the last three years, more than half of all organizations have consistently been consulted or invited to engage on policy or action plans in WPS-HA at local, regional or national levels. 65% of local women's organizations stated that they were sometimes, often or frequently consulted to engaged on WPS-HA issues, indicative of women's rights organizations becoming more influential and consolidating their positions as critical agents

of change and representing a positive increase of 4% since last year.

Regionally, women's organizations in Africa were consulted the most with 76% of CSOs noting this, followed by those in Asia and the Pacific (69%), Arab States (68%), and Europe and Central Asia (65%), while just over half (56%) of organizations in LAC reported that they were either consulted or invited to engage on policy or action plans for WPS-HA.

Priorities of local women's organizations

Participating organizations were asked about their priorities in WPS-HA given their intimate knowledge of their communities and contexts. They highlighted that peacebuilding and economic recovery and the protection of women and girls in conflict and crisis settings continues to be core areas needed with 26% and 24% respectively citing this as their main priority. Another 12% note creating an enabling environment for WPS is a key concern, including the monitoring of the implementation of National Action Plans. Other programmatic priority areas for CSOs also include mental health, legal support and human rights.

In 2023, CSOs were asked for the first time about climate security and to what extent they consider climate insecurity to be exacerbating the conflict/humanitarian crisis in their country. Referring to the negative physical (climate-related) impacts that exacerbate food, water, or livelihood insecurity which can lead to increased pressure on peace and security in fragile and conflict-affected settings, 43% of all CSO respondents noted that there is a high risk that climate change is exacerbating the situation and will worsen in the future, with this trend being most pronounced in both Arab States (55%) and Africa (48%).

The Way Forward

Despite the gains made since UNSCR 1325 and the global calls for enhanced women's leadership and participation in WPS-HA, continued and dedicated financing is needed to support local women peacebuilders, humanitarians and women human rights defenders and their organizations' work to build peace, advance gender equality and respond to crisis. Not only does financing need to increase, but funding modalities from the international community and private sector actors need to continue to be flexible and aligned with the realities of grassroots organizations working on the frontlines in crisis and conflict settings. It is essential to sustain local women's organizations' leadership, work and impact to avoid rolling back vital progress made on inclusive peace and the realization of women's rights.⁹

Recommendations for Donors and Key Actors in the International Community

- ▶ Accelerate flexible and quality funding to support local women's rights organizations working in crisis and conflict settings, including multi-year institutional/core funding and programmatic funding which extends beyond 24 months.
- ▶ Mainstream key emerging priorities such as food security and climate security within the WPS-HA context and providing local women's organizations with spaces to respond contextually to these priorities and based on their experiences.
- ▶ Recognize the value of and supporting the safety, security and well-being of CSO personnel and volunteers and encouraging integration of initiatives such as psychosocial support and mental health work which will ensure their well-being is prioritized.
- ▶ Invest in strengthening the institutional capacity of local women's organizations working in conflict and crisis settings to increase their access to funding, improve their financial and risk management, enhance their ability to adapt, and support the overall continuation and sustainability of their work to impact WPS-HA.
- ▶ Provide spaces to local women's organizations to consult and receive technical support from funders during the design phase to ensure more impactful interventions, and to have opportunities to build their internal capacity in resource mobilization with other donors.
- ▶ Minimize the need for arduous documentation and processes for local women and youth grassroots organizations in applying for funds for WPS-HA, including diverse languages, streamlined templates, more support/guidance on project proposal writing and in implementation, while still ensuring a demand-driven and contextual process.
- ▶ Invest and support for women human rights defenders and civil society organizations facing increased threats and retaliation with emerging crisis and conflicts.

References

¹ United Nations Security Council (September 2023). Women and Peace and Security – Report of the Secretary General (S/2023/725)

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Report of the Secretary General, Women and Peace and Security, S/2022/740 (October 2022), <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S-2022-740.pdf>

⁶ Institutional funding refers to resources provided to an organization to sustain themselves through a crisis and build its institutional capacity. This is also referred to as core funding.

⁷ International Rescue Committee (2022), <https://www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/2023-03/Why%20Wait%20-%20Full%20Report%20-%20English.pdf> as cited from OCHA. County-Based Pooled Funds 2021 In Review. https://www.unocha.org/sites/unocha/files/CBPF_2021_inReview_masterlayout_20220607.pdf

⁸ AWID (2020), Where is the Money for Feminist Organizations? Available at: https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/AWID_Research_WITM_Brief_ENG.pdf

⁹ See also reports by AWID and Mama Cash (November 2020). Moving More Money to the Drivers of Change: How Bilateral and Multilateral Funders can Resource Feminist Movements.

For additional information on the WPHF, please visit:

- ▶ WPHF's Regular Funding Cycle: <https://wphfund.org/calls-for-proposals/>
- ▶ WPHF's Rapid Response Window: <https://wphfund.org/rrw/>
- ▶ WPHF's Funding Window for Women Human Rights Defenders: <https://wphfund.org/whrds/>
- ▶ WPHF's Global Learning Hub: <https://wphfund.org/wphfund-community/>



About WPHF

The United Nations Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) is a global partnership designed to accelerate action and support for women's participation, leadership, and empowerment in humanitarian response and peace and security settings. WPHF is a flexible and rapid financing mechanism supporting quality interventions designed to enhance the capacity of women to prevent conflict, respond to crises and emergencies, and seize key peacebuilding opportunities.

Since its launch in 2016, WPHF has established itself as a highly relevant and credible multi-partner trust fund, channeling urgently needed funds to local and grassroots civil-society organizations working on women, peace and security and humanitarian action around the world. To date, WPHF has funded over 1,200 local women's organizations working to support women to be a force for crisis response and lasting peace in 44 countries. In addition, WPHF has supported the participation and the protection of over 450 women human rights defenders and women peacebuilders in 22 countries.

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